

## **Tribal leader Miller, 60, shared spirit by teaching**

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Bruce Miller nurtured Salish art and culture.

They began gathering Saturday, and they will keep coming each day, more and more, from all over the country, to honor Bruce Miller, a Skokomish spiritual leader whose teaching nourished a Salish renaissance of art and culture in the Northwest and beyond.

Mr. Miller died of a stroke Saturday at age 60.

Yesterday morning, family, friends and admirers kept arriving from around the country and the region to share songs, prayers, memories and stories of the man who dedicated his life to learning and passing on the gifts of his ancestors' knowledge and artistic skills.

Young people kept fires burning in wood stoves at either end of the Skokomish smokehouse, a simple cedar building with a carefully raked earthen floor at the tribal nation near the southwest end of Hood Canal. They welcomed elders to seats by the fire, and brought steaming plates bending with food.

"It is the time of healing, for the mind and the body and the spirit," said Neah Martin, 70, a Swinomish tribal elder who came to pay her respects. "The people that are coming are broken spirits, and it's going to be up to the family at Skokomish to help them begin the healing journey."

Tribal cooks began planning a dinner for at least 800 expected tomorrow and 1,500 Saturday at the Skokomish smokehouse.

### **A time for remembering**

A viewing for Bruce Miller will be held at the Skokomish smokehouse, N. 170 Tribal Center Road, Skokomish Nation, tomorrow from noon to 6 p.m. A celebration of Mr. Miller's life and a time for remembering will be held Saturday from noon to 6 p.m., also at the smokehouse. Both events are open to the public.

Donations can be sent to the Twana Seowyn Society, N. 170 Tribal Center Road, Skokomish 98584.

"We're making everything he loved," said Nikki Burfiend, one of Miller's nieces and head cook.

### **Youngest of 15**

Born April 23, 1944, Mr. Miller, the youngest of 15 children, was raised in an extended-family household in the home of his grandparents, parents, great-uncles and numerous cousins. The house was full of baskets, blankets and ceremonial regalia, some heirlooms dating back eight generations.

"I realized at an early age that these heirloom things were almost like history books to us," Mr. Miller told The Seattle Times last July. "They were the way that we retained our history and passed it on."

As a young child, he would go to his great-grandmother's house "and she would relate the family traditions and stories in oral recitations the old people talk about. That was the sprouting of the seed of curiosity that lie within me at that point."

He worked in the theater in New York and in 1967 was drafted into the U.S. Army. He served two tours in Vietnam, earning the Army Medal of Commendation.

He was appointed the tribe's cultural and educational director in 1971 and earned stature for his traditional knowledge, including a repertoire of more than 120 Skokomish tribal stories, some of which take days to tell.

He was a master of Skokomish basketry, weaving and cedar-mat making. In 1974, he founded the Twana Dance Group, which has performed for thousands of people throughout the Northwest.

Mr. Miller helped bring back several ceremonies that were once banned by U.S. government agents and missionaries.

He also developed a substance-abuse program for the tribe based on Skokomish and Salish legends, and created an herbal and medicinal garden visited by ethnobotanists from around the world. He compiled and illustrated 12 books based on his family's stories.

He was honored with a National Heritage Fellowship by the National Endowment for the Arts in 2004.

Mr. Miller was careful to pass on different skills to each of his apprentices, so they would need each other.

"Not one of us could walk in his shoes; it takes all of us to take the first step," said Delbert Miller, one of Mr. Miller's nephews and a tribal spiritual leader.

"The legacy left behind by subiyay is represented in the rebirth of so many traditional aspects of the culture," said his nephew Michael Pavel of Skokomish, referring to Mr. Miller by his Indian name. "There are so many contributions to celebrate: theater, genealogy, art, history, language, ceremonial protocol, botany, spiritual ways of behaving ranging from being generous and always willing to be of service to never turning away from calls for help.

"Subiyay was and remains a gift given to us by the creator."

### **Loved a good prank**

Called Uncle by everyone, family or not, Mr. Miller also was known for his love of a good prank, a good belly laugh and for his fondness for Marilyn Monroe, whose picture greeted visitors to his home at the front door.

He is survived by his son Carpio Bernal of Taos, N.M.; daughter Kimberly Miller of Skokomish; sisters Jeanne Everenden, Anne Pavel, Louella Hansen and Antoinette Lewis, all of Skokomish; brother Ned Miller; sisters-in-law Peggy Miller, Lucinda Miller and Lillian Miller; 50 nieces and nephews; and numerous great-nephews and nieces.

He also leaves countless spiritual children, nourished through apprenticeship in his traditional knowledge. Mr. Miller welcomed members of other tribes as well as his own to train in traditional ways so they could take them back to their own people.

"Even though he is on the other side, he will never, ever be gone," said Vi Hilbert, an elder from the Upper Skagit Tribe who tearfully called Mr. Miller "my pet."

"We are selfish people. We want them to stay with us forever," she said. "It is part of being human. We have to let them go. But his memory is here forever."

In recent months, Mr. Miller seemed to know his time was near. He began giving things away and

telling his apprentices he was at peace, knowing he had taught them what he knew they needed to carry on.

Mr. Miller told The Seattle Times last July, "It is the satisfaction of seeing the living knowledge of my people carried on one more generation. It is not just a picture that you can look at in a book and say, this was what once was.

"One of my greatest satisfactions is to see my apprentices become master teachers. It's all connected to our ancient need to become immortal. Some of us write our names on the walls, some of us write them on the rocks, some of us carve them in trees. My sense of immortality is when the people I teach the various things begin to teach it themselves. Then I am assured I won't become an empty memory. My breath will continue to breathe into the future generations."